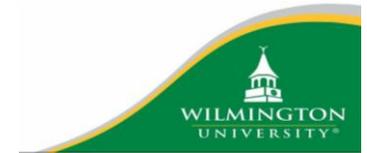


# TIPS FOR TEACHING SENSITIVE MATERIAL AND TEACHING MATERIAL SENSITIVELY

Debra L. Berke, Ph.D., CFLE  
Director, Center for Prevention Science



1

## Goals

Discuss pedagogy vs. andragogy and good educational principles

Discuss trauma-informed educational practices

Discuss how to address sensitive topics using trauma-informed practices

Discuss self-care for the trainer



2

## Content Notification



3

## Community Agreement

- Set microphones to mute when not speaking.
- Webcams on/off – your choice!
- Use nonverbal means to indicate you would like to speak, e.g., raise hand.
- Please do not hesitate to utilize the chat to communicate.
- Private messages welcome!
- Connect, learn, and have fun!



4

## Learning Reflection

- Think about your best learning experience. Where were you? How old were you? Who was there? What happened? Why was it the “best” experience?



5

## Pedagogy vs. Andragogy

Table 1

	Assumptions About Learners	
	Pedagogy	Andragogy
<b>Self-Concept</b>	Dependency	Self-directiveness
<b>Experience</b>	Of little worth	Learners are a rich resource for learning
<b>Readiness</b>	Biological development social pressure	Developmental tasks of social roles
<b>Time Perspective</b>	Postponed application	Immediacy of application
<b>Learning Orientation</b>	Subject Centered	Problem Centered
<b>Motivation</b>	Extrinsic	Intrinsic

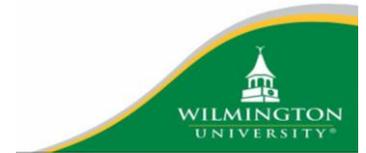
Source: Knowles, 1984



6

## Discussion

- Which principles – pedagogy or andragogy – best “fit” your ideal learning experience and why?
- Thinking about the trainings you have done, have you used principles of pedagogy or andragogy? Describe.
- What are the benefits of using pedagogical principles? Andragogical ones?
- Is it possible to do a training that combines principles of both? Why or why not?
- Which is trauma-informed?
- Which might work best for sensitive topics?



7

## Trauma/Toxic Stress and Learning

- When individuals experience continuous threats/toxic stress/trauma, **the brain/body is put into a chronic state of fear**, activating the “survival brain” (mid/lower areas of the brain).
- This can create an **overactive alarm system** in the developing brain.
- “Trauma reminders” or “triggers” **cause “survival brain” to activate** even when there is no actual threat.

This is not a rational/cognitive process. It is wired into our physiological response.

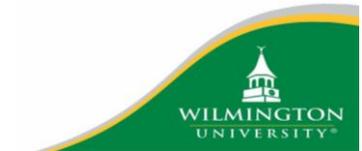
Trauma and Resilience: An Adolescent Provider Toolkit; Adolescent Health Working Group 2013



8

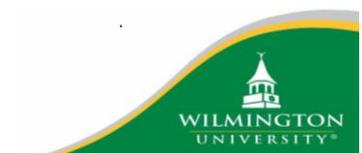
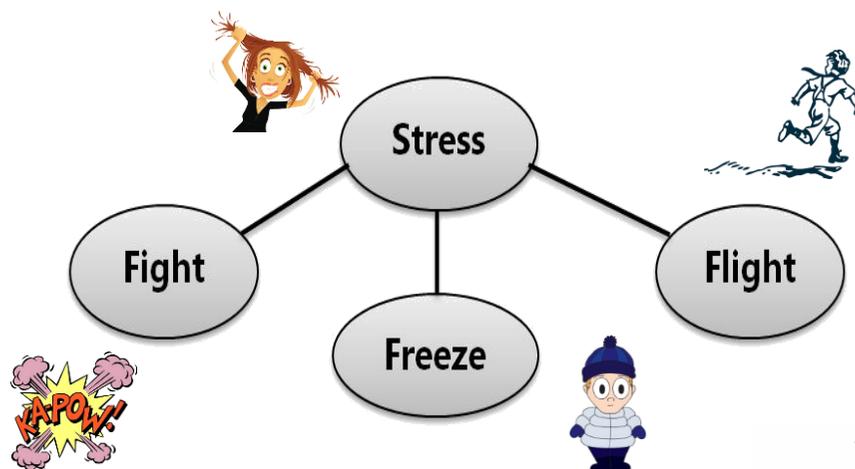
## Effects of Trauma/Toxic Stress on the Brain

- ✓ **Enlargement of amygdala**—sends false alarms, activates stress response, scans environment for threats
  - Difficulty maintaining attention
- ✓ **Locus Coeruleus**—releases too much noradrenaline
  - Increased anxiety, arousal, and aggression
- ✓ **Pre Frontal Cortex**—is down regulated
  - Lack of reasoning, compromised ability to override instincts and impulses, inability to concentrate, make good decisions
- ✓ **Hippocampus**—is smaller
  - Difficulty creating short and long term memories



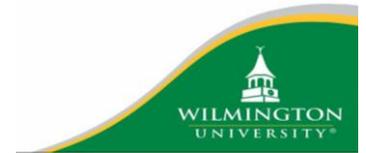
9

## Fight, Flight or Freeze



10

## What does fight, flight, or freeze look like in a training?



11

## Let's explore...

- What does it mean to use **trauma-informed educational practices**?
- What does it mean to be a **trauma sensitive trainer and a trainer who teaches sensitive topics sensitively**?
- What does it mean to create **an inclusive and engaging learning environment**?



12

# Trauma-Informed Educational Practices



**Realize**

All people at all levels have a basic **realization** about trauma, and how it can affect individuals, families, and communities.



**Respond**

Programs, organizations and communities **respond** by practicing a trauma-informed approach.



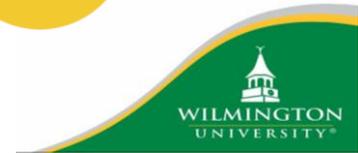
**Recognize**

People within organizations are able to **recognize** the signs and symptoms of trauma.



**Resist Re-Traumatization**

Organizational practices may compound trauma unintentionally, trauma informed organizations avoid this **re-traumatization**.



# Trauma-Informed Educational Practices

SAMHSA'S 6 PRINCIPLES  
*of a*

TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH



**SAFETY**

Prevents violence across the lifespan and creates safe physical environments.

**TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Fosters positive relationships among residents, City Hall, police, schools and others.

**EMPOWERMENT**

Ensures opportunities for growth are available for all.

**COLLABORATION**

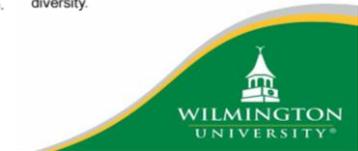
Promotes involvement of residents and partnership among agencies.

**PEER SUPPORT**

Engages residents to work together on issues of common concern.

**HISTORY, GENDER, CULTURE**

Values and supports history, culture and diversity.



## What do you see?



15

## Shifting Your Perspective

- Instead of asking/thinking *“What is wrong with you?”*
- Ask/think
  - *“What happened to you?”*
  - *“What did not happen for you?”*
  - *“What wasn’t modeled for you?”*
  - *“What’s right with you?”*

*Trauma-informed educators recognize the actions of our learners are a direct result of their life experiences. When your learners act out or disengage, don’t think, ‘What is wrong with you?’ but rather, ‘What happened to you?’*

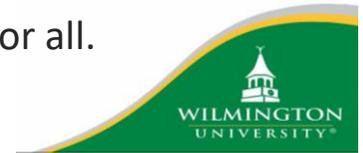
(Huang et al., 2014)



16

## Trauma-Informed Educational Practices

- ✓ Recognize the prevalence and the effects of trauma.
- ✓ Understand how trauma can be triggered.
- ✓ Help learners regulate emotions and control impulses.
- ✓ Have educators who are aware of their own trauma, triggers, and can control emotions/behaviors.
- ✓ Demonstrate compassion for self and learners.
- ✓ Empower learners to learn.
- ✓ Recognize and acknowledge the strengths of the learners.
- ✓ Build an environment that supports learning for all.



17

## Responding Instead of Reacting

### *Traditional Reactions*

- “You are making this more difficult than it is.”
- “You need to pay attention.”
- “You need to be responsible.”
- “If you don’t come to the training, you won’t get credit.”

### *Trauma Informed Responses*

- “I need to know how hard this is for you.”
- “You seem distracted. What’s on your mind?”
- “Let’s break this down so it is more manageable.”
- “Sometimes when we are overwhelmed, we shut down. How can I help?”



18

## Trauma-Informed Teaching Strategies that Promote Learning

- Empower learners, teach about growth mindset
- Check in with learners, establish connections
- Help learners identify mentors and support systems
- Express unconditional positive regard
- Maintain high expectations and consistency
- Check assumptions, observe, and question
- Model self-regulation skills and help learners develop them
- Model healthy communication and problem solving skills



19

## Other Considerations For Sensitive Topics

- Avoid stereotyping.
- Be even-handed with information provided.
- Be neutral.
- Prepare.
- Assess prior knowledge/experiences.
- Make connections.
- Encourage understanding different points of view.
- Take a breath and rephrase the question.
- Acknowledge hurtful or offensive remarks.



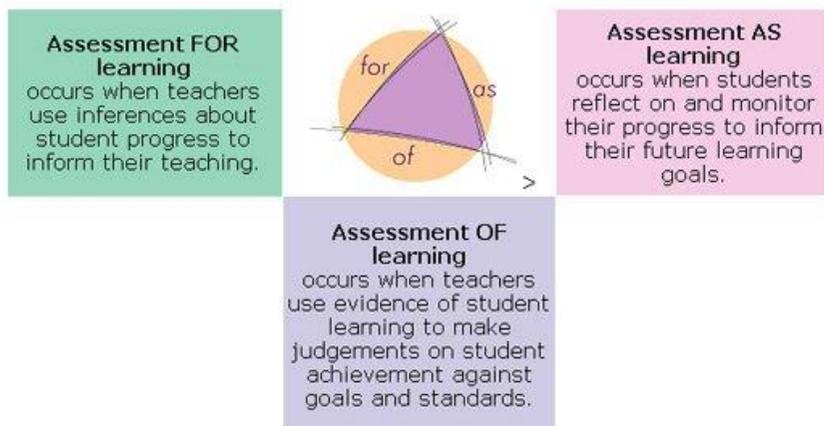
20

## Case Studies



21

## Assessment



22

## Assessment

- How do you typically check for understanding during the training?
- How do you check for understanding at the completion of the training?
- Are the ways that you assess learning trauma-informed?
- Do you assess trainings which cover sensitive topics differently from those which don't cover sensitive topics?



23

## Who experiences trauma/toxic stress?

- **First hand trauma:** personal trauma histories
- **Secondary trauma:** stress related to helping others with trauma
- **Compassion fatigue:** emotional and physical exhaustion leading to a diminished ability to empathize or feel compassion for others
- **Personal triggers:** recognize your triggers



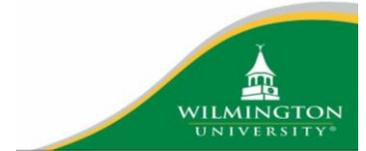
24

## Reflection

- How can I care for myself when teaching material which is sensitive and has the potential of traumatization?
- How can I care for myself when working with learners who have experienced traumatization or re-traumatization?



25



## Self-Care

- ✓ Any intentional actions you take to care for your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health
- ✓ Choosing behaviors that balance the effects of emotional and physical stressors
- ✓ Also essential to self-care is learning to *self-soothe* or calm our physical and emotional distress



26



## Examples of Grounding Exercises

- Remind yourself of who you are now.
- Take ten slow breaths.
- Splash some water on your face.
- Sip a cool drink of water or hold a cold can or bottle of soft drink in your hands.
- Hold a mug of tea in both hands and feel its warmth. Inhale its scent. Take small sips, and take your time tasting each mouthful.
- Play music. Using a pen and paper, start drawing a line as the music plays, representing it in the abstract on the page. Follow the music with the pen.



27

## Grounding Technique

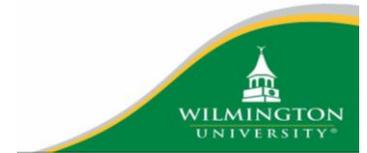


28



## Reflection

- Name one thing you learned.
- Describe one way you can implement what you've learned into your work.
- What questions do you have now?



31



32

## Learn more ...



### Wilmington University:

- [Center for Prevention Science](#)
- [Trauma Informed Approaches Undergraduate Certificate](#)
- [Trauma and Resilience Graduate Certificate](#)



33

## Connect with me at...



- Email:  
[Debra.L.Berke@WilmU.edu](mailto:Debra.L.Berke@WilmU.edu)
- Phone: (302) 356-6760



34